
RI BULLETIN

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Sudan: African Union Peace Monitors Creating Pockets of Security in Darfur

The African Union force in Darfur is beginning to bring a modicum of stability to parts of that war-torn region. Though small and slow to deploy, the force has successfully headed off attacks, negotiated the release of hostages and provided enough security for some displaced villagers to return home. These successes in the face of huge obstacles highlight the need for a bigger force with more logistical and financial support from the donors who are financing the AU deployment.

It seems improbable that a pick-up multinational force operating below its full strength of 3,320 could bring even pockets of stability to an area the size of Texas, where lack of roads, airfields and other infrastructure, plus vast deserts, high temperatures and a summer rainy season that turns every thing to mud, make operations difficult.

Yet the humanitarian community, United Nations officials, and military officers from the U.S. and Europe --- the AU's major donors --- all praise the force for saving lives. In Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, the headquarters of the AU, a UN official, using the acronym for African Union Mission in Sudan, said, "More people would have died if AMIS had not been there." A UN official in Khartoum added that "we're getting a huge result from a very few troops. Most people say that they are better than UN peacekeepers."

AMIS officers and Western officers cite specific accomplishments:

- Labado, a town of 27,000 people was leveled by Sudanese government backed forces in late December in order to drive out rebel forces. In January, the AU sector commander in Nyala, the capital of South Darfur state 40 miles to the west, heard that government directed forces were about to attack again. He rushed about 100 troops to Labado and the near by town of Muhajira and prevented a second attack. AMIS also stationed troops in Labado and thousands of displaced persons have returned.
- Earlier this year, AMIS heard that a government-backed militia known as the Janjaweed was about to attack Khor Abeche, a town north of Nyala. AMIS started sending in patrols to protect the village. Without this proactive deployment, the village "would have been torched," said a U.S. military officer who has worked closely with the AU troops.
- On February 21, rebels abducted seven workers from Catholic Relief Services in Jebel Moon, north of El Geneina, the capital of West Darfur. The AMIS sector commander immediately contacted the rebel leader, who admitted the abduction. The commander flew to Jebel Moon the next day and secured the release of the CRS workers. Earlier, AMIS won the release of a group of Sudanese soldiers captured by the same group.

These are, of course, fairly limited successes in a war that the Bush Administration has labeled genocide. By some estimates up to 300,000 have died from violence and war-related causes --- starvation, disease, lack of water --- and about 1.8 million have been displaced. What's more, AMIS generally gets low marks from residents of camps for the internally displaced; they see no improvement in security from the AU troops. A

sheik representing internally displaced people in Masteri south of El Geneina said of AMIS: “They come and go, but we do not see any results. The last time they were here we thought they would help, but we found them useless and they did not even greet us. They are just like the others.”

At first, the force of about 450 was supposed to report on violations of an April 8, 2004 ceasefire agreement between rebel groups and the government of Sudan. However, in October, the AU enlarged the force to a total of 3,320 and expanded its mandate to include the protection of civilians, humanitarian operations and to provide “visible military presence by patrolling and establishment of temporary outposts in order to deter uncontrolled armed groups from committing hostile acts against the population.”

This is a huge assignment for a force of any size. When it reaches full strength in about two weeks, the force will have around 640 monitors assigned to investigate ceasefire violations, 815 civilian police and some 1,900 soldiers to protect the monitors and the police. The main job of the police will be to work with Sudanese police to improve the security around camps for displaced people. Residents of these camps complain that the surrounding areas are so unsafe that men are afraid to leave for fear of being killed. Women, who must go out to collect firewood, are often robbed or raped, and Sudanese soldiers sometimes enter the camps to arrest or kill residents. The sector commander in Nyala, near the 120,000 resident Kalma camp, says that his civilian police, who are just arriving, will be assigned to patrol the perimeter of the camp in vehicles with Sudanese police. The idea is to improve security.

The ceasefire monitoring function of AMIS will continue. In response to reports, the AU Ceasefire Commission deploys teams comprised of members representing the AU, government, rebel forces, donor nations, usually the U.S. and the European Union, and Chad, which brokered last year’s ceasefire agreement. They are escorted by about 10-armed soldiers. They file public reports (see <http://www.africa-union.org>), but the reports often appear months after the event and are sometimes watered down, since the parties have to agree on the facts in the report. What’s more, there is no clear mechanism for enforcing recommendations.

However, the fact that ceasefire violations are being investigated at all and the inclusive nature of the teams, with rebel and government representatives, is proving to be a confidence building measure in an area characterized by hostility and mistrust. AU commanders say they have established good relations with all sides and with local authorities.

Increasingly, the most important actions involve proactive patrols and even the garrisoning of troops to prevent new attacks. The small size of the force limits its capacity to deter attacks. In addition, it has no real ability to collect signals or utilize aerial or other sophisticated intelligence that could alert it to planned attacks and early troop concentrations.

Officials at AU headquarters are already talking about doubling the size of the force, although no decision has been made. If the force were increased, the new soldiers, monitors and police could probably deploy more quickly than the first contingent. For one thing command and control and logistics arrangements, areas in which the two-year old AU had little experience or ability, have been worked out with support from donor countries.

The budget for the AU force this year is about \$220 million, with the European Union putting up \$100 million and the U.S. \$45 million. The U.S. is building the bases --- a headquarters and a secondary base in each of eight sectors, plus police facilities --- through a State Department contract with Pacific Architects & Engineers. AU officials say that deployments were delayed because PAE fell behind schedule. However, the facilities, which are tent camps, are largely completed and the force is approaching full strength. Canada and the Netherlands are supplying helicopters and crews and the United Kingdom is supplying about 650 vehicles. Donors pay the salary of the force and supply basic equipment such as helmets, protective vests, and communications gear. Tactical radio communications are adequate, but commanders lack reliable, high speed satellite internet connections to aid their communications with headquarters.

There have been many glitches along the way, all predictable for a new organization deploying a multinational force (the 815 police come from 16 countries) for the first time, while working out new relations with donors, most of whom have worked together for years as members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and still don't agree on all issues.

One problem has been maps. There are no good maps of Darfur. The first set of maps provided were from Switzerland and on a scale of 1:250,000. AMIS wanted more detailed maps, so the U.S. provided them with a scale of 1:200,000, but they were all in Russian and made in 1942. Only now is AMIS getting better maps, but since few decent roads exist in Darfur, they rely mostly on local guides.

The AU is seeking more technical support in such areas as contracting, logistics, operations, planning, communications, air operations and other military specialties. The donors are supplying the experts, but they are arriving slowly.

UN Secretary General Kofi Annan recently proposed that NATO or the EU send troops to stop military attacks and human rights violations in Darfur. So far, though, only the African Union has responded to the world's call to stop the killing in Darfur by putting troops on the ground. Every other military force is sitting on the sidelines. The UN Security Council is currently considering a new resolution on Sudan that will, among other things, establish a UN force to implement a new peace agreement in south Sudan. Some have proposed that AMIS be folded into that force, but this would be a mistake. AMIS is up and running, and it will take months to put together a capable force in the South.

"Despite the difficulties, we are very determined as Africans to see this mission succeed," says one sector commander. "Many people say bring in the UN or NATO because we lack the money and logistics, but if we are given the necessary assistance, we are going to succeed."

The heart of the inability of African institutions to police renegade members has been a reluctance to take tough political and economic actions against the governments that fail to protect their own people and create problems, such as refugee flows, for their neighbors. The AU is handling many of its differences with Sudan through negotiation, rather than confrontation. For example, AMIS has assembled a large library of photos to document atrocities, including executions, castrations, rapes, pillaging and burning of villages. Most of these atrocities have been committed by militias associated with the government, and AMIS refuses to make the photos public, although some were recently leaked to *The New York Times*. AMIS should post photos on its website to generate pressure to end the fighting.

Refugees International therefore recommends that:

- All combatants in Darfur honor the ceasefire and stop attacking civilians.
- The AU at least double the size of its force as soon as possible.
- Donor countries sharply increase support for AMIS, particularly in the areas of air transport, intelligence gathering and communications.
- The UN Security Council allow AMIS to remain an independent force.
- The police units that are about to deploy concentrate on increasing security in and around camps for internally displaced people.
- AMIS become more timely and proactive in issuing its reports on ceasefire violations, along with photographic and other evidence of atrocities.

Ken Bacon, Shannon Meehan and Eileen Shields-West have just completed an assessment of security conditions in Darfur.